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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

### "ON TEACHING ENGLISH."

*Editor School Review :*

DEAR SIR—All lovers of pure English, and especially those who, perhaps not themselves teachers of English, strive to teach others by example as well as by precept, will sympathize with Professor Brainerd Kellogg in his struggle with the difficulties of which he treats in his recent papers in the REVIEW. I am sorry that his modesty forbade him to speak more definitely of the character and the influence of our manuals and text-books of the English language. Just as many of our school courses seem based upon a belief that anybody can teach English sufficiently well, and that this subject may be taught incidentally, without having assigned to it any definite place in the school curriculum, so it would seem to be generally believed that one need have no special training in this study, and no large knowledge, to be competent to write a text-book of English grammar or rhetoric.

Whether the great mass of our school text-books have any reason for existing other than the desire for profit or for fame on the part of publishers or writers, is a doubt that forces itself upon every one who gives the matter a moment's thought: certainly it is not an exaggeration to say that not a fourth part of our books upon English but were better unwritten; and that fully fifty per cent. of them are arrant rubbish—unscientific in conception, in arrangement, in presentation; fraught with all the dangers of ignorant charlatancy.

As regards the *Don't* manuals, I am not able to controvert Professor Kellogg's condemnation of them as a whole, nor do I care to do so. But I believe that he fails to establish his case against them, in so far as it is dependent upon the examples he cites. It is a most difficult thing to determine what is and what is not good present use; however easy it may be to establish principles and dogmas. Professor Kellogg's method is certainly a scientific and valid one, provided only, that he chooses authors generally acknowledged to be masters of style, and that his reading of their works is exhaustive. But I should hesitate before accepting as conclusive a deduction from a maximum of three hundred pages of each author. Furthermore, in the preceding portion of his paper, Professor Kellogg shows how nearly impossible it is for the most watchful man to avoid errors of speech.

His collection of monstrosities is a sad one; and worse still, it might have been enlarged to almost any extent. Examples such as these—and those expressions which the consent of the fifty authors is held to justify are in nowise a distinct class—the teacher must, at least in my opinion, use, not as authority to sustain a doubtful usage, but rather as warnings, to emphasize the necessity for that incessant care which is the necessary price of accuracy in any line of human effort. Our best and most careful writers make mistakes; and that is all there is to it. Once begin to argue that the recurrence of a given error in a dozen of our best writers establishes it as good usage, and there is no line that can be drawn between the admissible and the inadmissible. For example, perhaps the error most prevalent throughout the country is that of the substitution of *will* for *shall*. Teachers, clergymen, college professors (even Professor Kellogg is guilty of "I would like"), literary men, all are guilty of it. Will any one argue that such consent establishes as good usage what is a flagrant violation of grammatical propriety? I have a better opinion of American scholarship than to believe any such thing. A few of the citations criticised may, perhaps, have slightly better authority; but all except one or two of them condemn errors which are manifestly such, by all the canons of grammatical and rhetorical purity.

I do not, of course, urge that an expression to be permissible must "parse," or must necessarily conform to the rules of analogy of the language. Quite the contrary. Language is a growth, and growth is very apt to be irregular. At the same time, there is such a thing as diseased growth. If errors persist in spite of our best efforts to eradicate them, our only course is to redouble our efforts. The stubborn persistence of sin in the world is never urged as an excuse for relaxing endeavors to crush it; and we should deal with these sins against purity of language as with sins in the moral world.

I am very truly yours,

*Charles B. Gleason.*

*Union High School, Redlands, Cal., March 18, 1893.*

#### "COLLEGE REQUIREMENTS IN GREEK."

*Editor School Review:*

SIR—In my article on *College Requirements in Greek* in the February number of THE SCHOOL REVIEW I find that I committed the very serious and apparently inexcusable error of classing Ripon College, Ripon, Wisconsin, among the colleges for which the preparation in Greek requires a year or less (vid. p. 77). As I now find, the requirement is, and for the past thir-